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ABSTRACT

Short-term travel study programs for high school students offer international interpersonal encounters, exposure to foreign languages, and opportunities for students to develop a sense of global citizenship and international responsibility. There appears to be a growing interest among educators in involving students in foreign travel and study. A short-term overseas program can take several forms, but the combination of travel with study and a homestay is preferred for promoting growth in foreign language ability and appreciation, international awareness, adaptability, non-materialism, and independence and responsibility. School administrators need information about the legal and insurance aspects of such a program as well as particulars concerning quality, itinerary, costs, program administration, and past program record in order to choose or approve adoption of a program. Details to be organized or investigated include provisions for transportation, lodging, meals, tips, entertainment, gifts, passports and visas, insurance, baggage, medical treatment, and student screening. Student orientation should focus on cultural similarities and differences and on language abilities and personal skills needed to adjust to the new environment. The use of role-playing, simulation, and reading a variety of related books is also recommended. (MSE)

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Q & A

TRAVEL STUDY PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS: GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

Prepared by Helene Zimmer-Loew

November, 1986

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

Q&A

TRAVEL STUDY PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS: GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

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What Are The Benefits of Short-Term Travel Study Programs?

The short-term travel study program is one of the most exciting and potentially valuable ventures in education today. International people-to-people encounters are probably the most effective way to instill global and cultural awareness in individuals, especially when they are young. Such exchanges remove students from their usual surroundings and routine and bring them into sustained face-to-face interactions with people who are fundamentally different from themselves. Such experiences place the students in situations where they are personally involved and intellectually challenged intensively during most of their waking moments over a period of many weeks. There is no better way to present to students the study of a "foreign" language as a useful exercise than when they themselves are using the skills acquired in the classroom to cope in real-life communicative situations.

As worldwide communication makes us increasingly aware of the interdependence of nations, educators in the United States are becoming more insistent on a greater role for international issues in the general curriculum as well as in extracurricular activities. Organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Association of School Administrators are supporting resolutions and programs that provide opportunities and experiences for students to develop a sense of global citizenship and international responsibility. With the announcement of the President's Initiative on Youth Exchange in 1982, even more secondary schools and communities have been encouraged to become involved in youth one-way and exchange programs.

Because of the diversity of profit and not-for-profit agencies involved, it is difficult to estimate the number of American secondary students who study, work and/or travel abroad either for the short term or for a full academic year. However, despite short-term reversals, there appears to be a growing interest among educators, especially within the local/regional school community, in taking a more active part in involving their students in foreign travel and study as well as encouraging foreign students to visit their schools. Most will probably choose an already established program, while fewer others will create their own programs through personal or professional contacts. In either case, there are several major components of such programs to be planned, implemented, evaluated and reviewed.

What Should Be The Goals of The Program ?

A short-term overseas program can take several forms: (1) travel with study and a homestay; (2) study only; and (3) travel only. The main reason for taking students abroad is to expose them to the various aspects of other cultures, and to improve their ability to communicate with native speakers of the language(s) they have studied in the classroom in the United States. Therefore, unless carefully balanced, options 2 and 3 defeat the purpose of transporting students to another country. Intensive classroom sessions can be just as well offered at home. To be worthwhile, travel only must be preceded by a careful, lengthy orientation and implemented with an agenda of on-the-spot problem solving activities.

Option 1 is without question the preferred type of overseas program. Recent research has shown that secondary students living with a new family in another country display accelerated growth and improvement in the following areas:

Foreign language ability and appreciation: the ability to communicate with people in a second language and thus to take advantage of opportunities and alternatives resulting from bilingualism.

International awareness: an understanding that the world is one community; a capacity to empathize with people in other countries; an appreciation of the common needs and concerns of people in different cultures.

Adaptability: the ability to deal flexibly with and adjust to new people, places and situations; a willingness to change behavior patterns and opinions when influenced by others.

Non-materialism: not placing high value on material things; concern for spiritual fulfillment.

Independence, responsibility for self: the ability to exercise self-control and to be self-directed; the capacity to avoid conformity and to resist peer pressure.

Whether developing your own program with a school abroad or choosing an established one, the intended learning outcomes for students should serve as primary guidelines for your final choice.

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How Can You Convince School Administrators That The Program Will Be Valuable?

Administrators, boards of education and their attorneys will want details on quality of the programs, the itinerary, costs, administration of the organization, and its past record. Of even more importance to these gatekeepers today are the legal aspects of travel study ventures, and insurance coverage. Be well prepared to present these critical details to the board, or your careful planning will have been in vain. The fear of lawsuits has recently caused many boards to deny educators permission to offer travel study programs under school auspices.

Using the Advisory List of International Educational Travel and Exchange Programs published by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, and calling your professional language association(s) for recommendations are both excellent ways to ensure that you have chosen an established, reliable program.

What Details Must Be Organized And/Or Investigated?

Transportation: airfare, surface transportation, public transportation, tour costs;

Lodging: home stays and hotels during the travel portions of the program;

Meals: family meals, meals in hotels;

Tips: for hotel personnel, bus drivers, guides;

Entertainment: students should know how much money they will need for socializing, movies;

Gifts: especially for a homestay, students should bring a small token of appreciation to present to their hosts;

Passports and visas: have students apply early and check on their progress;

Insurance: liability insurance should be investigated by the school attorney who will also recommend the wording of a release form; insurance costs must be included in your program costs.

Baggage: students should consider this their responsibility; many homeowner policies cover the cost of a loss abroad.

Medical: again, most students will be covered under family health and accident policies, which should be reviewed to assure that coverage extends to a foreign country. Many commercial and not-for-profit tours also include medical insurance in their package.

Screening of students: be sure to review the psychological and health records of all students you are sending or accompanying. Identifying medical and mental problems before departure will curtail most major problems while abroad.

What Kind of Orientation Should You Conduct?

Orientation is the preparation of students for the adjustments they must make abroad in order to achieve the personal as well as group objectives of the program. It is a process of educating the participants to think and respond effectively in another environment to prevent major culture shock. Orientation should focus on the similarities and differences between the students' culture and the culture(s) to be visited. General social and cultural elements as well as customs and mores should be included. Significant portions of the orientation should focus on the language ability and personal skills students will need to adjust to the new environment. Through orientation sessions, individuals should become more aware of themselves and their relationship to their own culture. Often, role playing and simulation exercises are excellent vehicles for sparking such awareness. Students should be urged to read history and geography books as well as texts on sociology and economics if time permits.

Resources

Council on International Educational Exchange
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Council on Standards for International Education
1906 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

Institute of International Education
809 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

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